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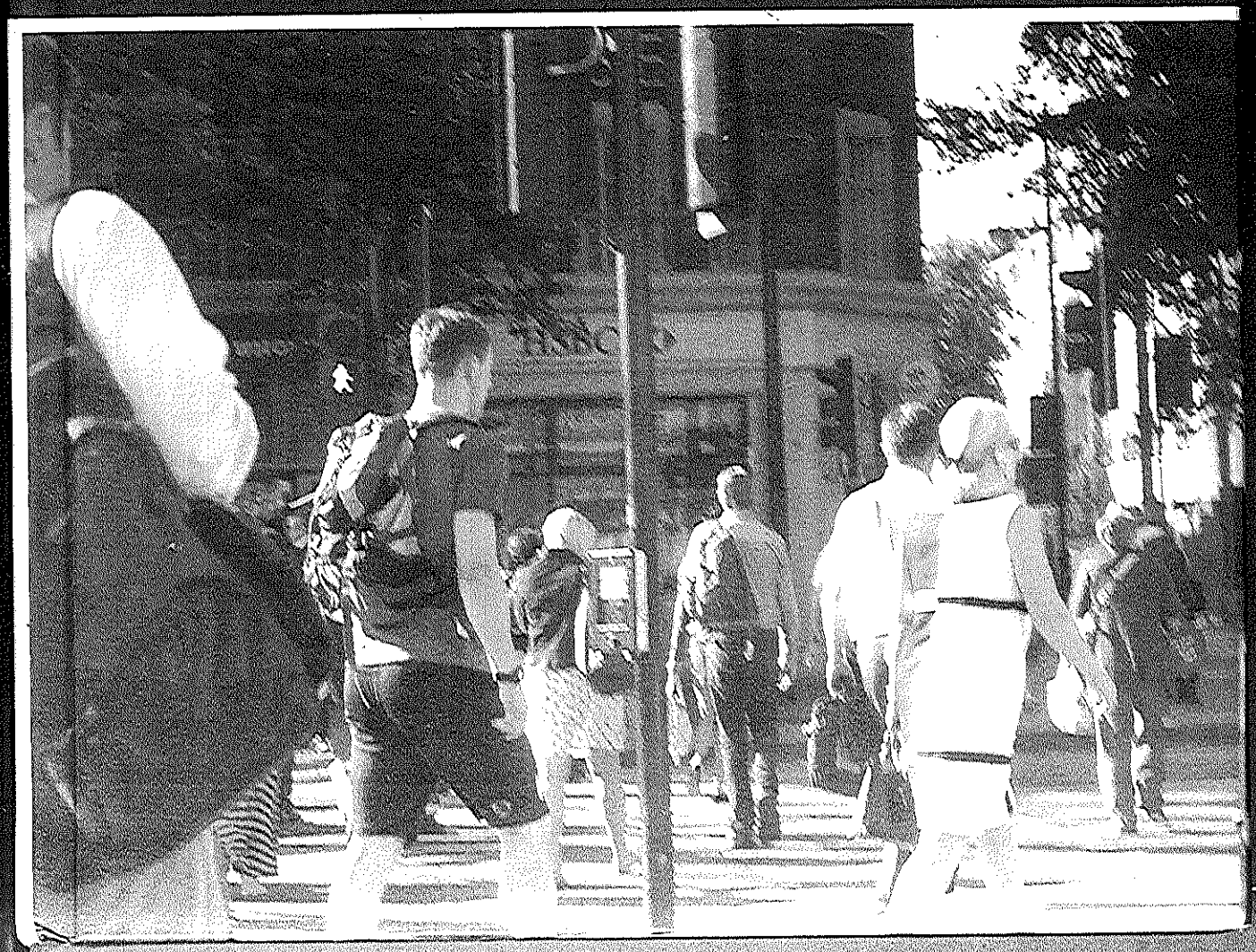

Walking in the European City

Quotidian Mobility and Urban Ethnography

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Chapter 13

A Walk Around the Block: Creating Spaces for Everyday Encounters

Hilary Ramsden

Preamble

In 2005 I was making a film with a community theatre group in Bristol. We had to film one of the performers, J., getting off the train at his local rail station. That done, we drove to the local community centre to meet the rest of the group. As we motored, J., who was brought up in the area, started to tell us about the places we were passing. He rattled off facts at an amazing speed but had to break off from what he was telling us about each place to start telling us about the next and the next, as they came upon us, pell mell, at 30 miles per hour. We ended up with a dizzying array of half-finished facts and stories told at triple the normal speed of speech. As we were listening, I remembered a story told by Bruce Chatwin (1988:292) about an Aboriginal travelling companion whose 'lips moved at the speed of a ventriloquist's and, through them, came a rustle: the sound of wind through branches … .Limpy had learnt his Native Cat couplets for walking pace, at four miles an hour, and we were travelling at twenty-five'. Aboriginal peoples bring their land and themselves into existence by sing-walking their songlines. J. was attempting something similar and we were also travelling too fast for him to give us the details. This kind of recounting can only be properly done at a walking pace. Travelling faster we lose the ability to tell it all because as we begin, other memories surface, we make further connections to things forgotten. This prompted me to think about the stories we miss, the intricate and intimate details that are glossed over in our hurry to get to our destination. Walking affords us an opportunity to look around, making connections to our past traces and forgotten narratives, our buried songlines, thereby restitching our attachments and engagements to our surroundings.

Introduction

This chapter outlines the creation and testing of a participatory practice-based arts methodology, which explores whether intentional and performative acts of walking in the city can effect changes in the attitudes and perceptions of walkers to their neighbourhood and environment that might encourage dialogue and exchange.

I've called it an ethno-Situationist methodology, a flexible model created from the intersection of multiple strands of theory and practice. It seeks to provoke new understandings of the ways in which we think, look, listen, perceive and relate to others, and our surroundings, facilitating opportunities for the creation of a new form of political civility through listening, encounter and dialogue.

My walking-as-art practice, begun in 1999 and inspired by exploring desire lines in Detroit, was further developed during a theatre project – the *Walking Project* – which involved artists, community groups and the general public in Michigan, USA, and KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, over a three year period from 2003–2006. Inspired by the convivial and collaborative nature of this work and by the discussions and dialogue about differences in culture, language, religion and politics which emerged during our public walks, I wondered how such opportunities might be accessed by a wider public and on a more regular, everyday basis. The walks we had taken as part of the *Walking Project* were like many of the walks undertaken by contemporary artists and geographers – they were part of an arts project, marked out as special and after the walks everyone returned (apparently) to their lives as normal. I began to wonder what might emerge from looking anew or with fresh eyes on a repeated everyday walk through our own local city neighbourhoods.

Creating a Methodology

Drawing on the empirical work of David Seamon (1978), Francis Augoyard ([1979] 2007), Situationist practices, my own experiences as clown and theatre practitioner and a wide range of contemporary theorists and practitioners concerned with the city and urbanism, I decided to employ a walk which is often overlooked as being mundane and even boring, not worthy of recall: an everyday walk with a purpose, that many people all over the world take every day: a regular walk, for example to the shops, the pub, school, work or the bus stop. This walk would become a kind of mini-laboratory for experimentation with opportunities for a range of different encounters. David Seamon (1976:99) maintains an encounter is '*any situation of attentive contact between the person and the world at hand*'. The key word here is *attentive*. As Eilis, (a participant in my research) observed, paying attention results quickly in a bombardment of the senses, which is so overwhelming that we need to switch off in order to get on with our daily lives, thus becoming less attentive. Seamon suggests that there is a continuum of attentiveness that 'extends from obliviousness and minimal attentive contact with the world at hand through watching, noticing, and more intense kinds of encounter where the experiencer feels a sense of 'merging' with some aspect of world' (Seamon 1976:99).

The everyday walk provides a perfect vehicle (excuse the pun) for this kind of switching on and off of attention. Furthermore, it acts, in Federica Gatta's and Maria Anita Palumbo's (Chapter 14) words, as 'a gateway to a hyper-reality, where encounters are possible … and the researcher [in this case the participants] lets

him- or herself get inhabited by a place in order to later step back and grasp a fuller picture'. I created a set of methodological tools in the form of playful interruptions within this everyday walk. These would create opportunities for walkers to feel a heightened awareness that might lead to them experiencing moments of surprise or wonder, as defined by Edward Casey (2008) and Jane Bennett (2001). Being in what I term an *I-don't-know-space*[1] of uncertainty provoked by these interruptions, participants might become more receptive to new thought processes. Uncertainty could be seen to produce defensiveness or a closing down. However, because the walker is in control of the interruptions which have caused the uncertainty there is more possibility that this uncertainty might lead to an openness instead. I wondered whether the uncertainty that emerged from this *I-don't-know-space* might provoke reflections, interrogations and insights into the way we negotiate and interpret the space around us. Experiencing a certain comfort in inhabiting the *I-don't-know-space,* could create a receptivity for what Finn (1996) terms an 'ethical encounter' with others.[2] Such encountering though not necessarily bringing us to closer agreement or consensus, may lead us to a closer understanding of one another, perhaps beyond the categories that often divide us.

Participants and the Walker's Pack

I recruited 30 participants who made a habitual, repeated walk, in most cases more than once a week. Some make their particular walk more than once a day.[3] There was no required length for the walk, which varied from 50 meters to between two and three miles. I asked participants to observe their everyday walk four times, preferably within one month, the first and last walks without interruptions, (with a

1 By the term *I-don't-know* time-space, I mean a state which might emerge from a process of paying increased attention or from caused by an interruption. This state might be seen as being an in-between state which precedes the action of the response of a ready answer, opinion, assumption or presupposition. As such it might create opportunities that provoke questioning, or elicit an action or response that is different from our habitual patterns. The *I-don't-know-space* can be likened to a temporary state of what is termed in theatre as a suspension of disbelief; for example, a person attending a theatre performance is frequently required to suspend their normal assumptions and beliefs in order to engage fully with a fantasy or fictional narrative, that they otherwise might not believe in: thus their disbelief in that narrative or text is temporarily suspended. I suggest that an interruption that might temporarily cause a moment of what Jane Bennett (2001) terms wonder might lead to new thought processes and ways of thinking, prompting the person experiencing this state to temporarily see, or look differently at things, people or relationships, for example.

2 Geraldine Finn (1996:153) defines the 'ethical encounter' as a place where we try to 'establish relationships with others in "excess" of (beyond and between) the categories that render us knowable and/or already known (as representations of the Same, the familiar)'.

3 Eileen, for example, often makes the walk to her local shop three times a day.

view to creating a potentially 'normal' first and last walk) and the second and third walks with interruptions.

I made a Walker's Pack that could be carried easily and looked enticing. Made from two cardboard compact disc cases, taped together it opened on one side into a customized, laminated map of the square mile[4] centred upon the walker's home. I felt the size of this map showed enough detail of their neighbourhood, yet enabled most participants to draw on it the whole of their everyday route. The other cover was left whole to hold four pieces of notepaper. Opened out, the pack reveals instructions and interruptions for the walks. Folded up, the pack is secured with a rubber band, holding a pencil to write or draw with and a pen to mark the route on the map.

The Interruptions

Participants could choose to do one or more of the eight interruptions listed in the Walker's Pack:

1. Walk back home using exactly the same route, crossing the road in the same places, walking along the same side of the pavement ... as precisely as you can. What do you notice?
2. Pause in your walk every 5 minutes. Take a look around – what do you see? Close your eyes. What do you hear? Record something every time you stop.
3. When you set out what is the first colour you see? Notice everything along the walk that is this colour. What else do you notice?
4. Wear a different pair of shoes. You can choose a seemingly inappropriate pair. What do you notice?
5. Stop on a corner. Stand there for one minute. Can you stand there for any longer?
6. Talk to at least one person while you're out on your route.
7. Walk backwards along your route. What do you notice?
8. How slowly can you walk? What happens when you walk this slowly?

I devised the interruptions mindful that most participants were not used to improvising or being seen doing out-of-the-ordinary actions in public spaces. But I did want to provide the opportunity for risk-taking and experimentation.

4 It was important to me to reference here an idea from Welsh vernacular culture, of the square mile, in Welsh, *y filltir sgwar,* as espoused by Welsh critic, Ned Thomas and more recently performer, writer and researcher, Mike Pearson. Pearson (2005) suggests that 'until the age of eight we know one square mile in a detail that we will never know anywhere else again in our lives ... So it's here that we begin to orientate ourselves, where the creation of identity begins'.

Therefore, the interruptions ranged from what I considered to be low-risk – such as choosing a colour to follow – to more high-risk – such as wearing a possibly inappropriate pair of shoes, or standing on a corner for a minute or longer.

Of the 26 participants who completed the walks all made written notes, seven took photos and several made drawings and collected small objects during their walks. I conducted Pre-Walks Interviews varying in length from 6 to 15 minutes and Post-Walks Interviews varying in length from 9 to 90 minutes. Once all the materials, including photographs, drawings and found objects, were collected, and I had studied the transcribed interviews in some detail, I organized a group de-briefing session which became a bit of a party. Here I outlined some of the major themes to emerge from the research, gave participants their transcribed interviews for review, played a slide show of all the photos taken by participants on their walks, and then asked a number of follow up questions which led to further discussion.

The interruptions varied in popularity with 14 people choosing number 3, the colour interruption and only 2 completing number 8, the slow walk (several other participants chose this but gave up part way). Number 5, stopping and standing on a corner, was also popular, with 11 people choosing to do this even though many admitted to feeling awkward whilst doing it.

Why Walking?

Bristol is the UK's eighth most populated city but divided into distinct and walkable neighbourhoods that are in many places connected by walking and cycling routes. It has recently been named European Green Capital for 2015, making it a role model for putting new environmentally-friendly ideas into practice, including making it a walkable city. For the Bristol participants in the research, walking is a necessary part of their lives, a regular mode of travel and a deliberately chosen activity for a number of reasons: Eilis walks over The *Cut*:[5] 'If I want I can stop and look over the bridge, which is an essential thing on bridges: you just have to stop and look. Walking over the *Cut* and noticing the tide every day. It's my little bit of countryside … I can see the seasons'. Participants, like Sarah, mentioned the opportunity to engage with others: 'Walking round here … I often bump into somebody like the woman who works in the library across the street, or I've seen Mr K. down, out somewhere else, quite nice to be able to say 'Hello' to people'. Marcus feels 'there's more interaction with people on the street or people on the Gloucester Road'. Michael: 'you bump into other people, you see other people on the way, so it's a very social, kind of communal thing'. And Lin: 'People have always walked places so there's that connection with other people you know.

5 Officially the *New Cut*, an artificial waterway constructed to direct the tidal Avon through parts of south Bristol.

You see more things, you quite often talk to people on the way or you see a cat you know … '.

For Faith walking is an important way for her to feel part of her neighbourhood:

> the more I walk the more I know where I live and the more I have a sense of belonging, and that really matters to me. So that's quite a key thing. And you get to know people as you're walking and I find that really … helps me overcome things that happened in the past, actually. So I think … there's a combination of stamping my ground and just … putting out feelers and sort of having a sense of belonging.

Attachment and Belonging

Many participants mentioned notions of belonging and attachment to the local area and neighbourhood as being reasons to walk. Interruptions #2 and #5 specifically concerned such notions. These asked participants stop or pause in their walk, and to stand on a corner for 1 minute or longer. Staying in one particular place for a longer amount of time than they would normally offered the opportunity to look and listen more closely to what was going on around them. Gemma Coradi Fiumara's reference to Heidegger who 'uses the expression 'to dwell' when referring to a genuine attempt to listen' (Fiumara 1995:189) is interesting here: perhaps in order to inhabit a place we need to listen. Therefore, how might stopping in our tracks and listening affect our responses to, and feelings about, a neighbourhood, in this case neighbourhoods in Bristol, and contribute to our sense of place and belonging? What kinds of understandings do we accumulate through this listening that enable us to make connections to place? Jean-François Augoyard asks: 'In the collective space that is the city, what part is frequented, appropriated, and effectively inhabited (in the active sense) by each inhabitant?' (2007:7). Inhabiting implies being able to stay long, to be long in one place, requiring a certain sense of ownership, of 'right to remain', there. Tim Ingold writes: 'It is through being inhabited, rather than through its assimilation to a formal design specification, that the world becomes a meaningful environment for people' (2000:173). Edward Casey (in Anderson 2004:255) writes that 'place is regarded as constitutive of one's sense of self'. So how we conceive of ourselves directly influences how we conceive place, and our own places, such as home and neighbourhood.

Place is also recognized as a powerful repository for stories and narratives, memories and identifications, which according to David Abram 'always happen *somewhere*' (1997:163). Such narratives create our ties and connections to a place, contributing to a sense that we exist some*where*. With increased economic and social mobility in the Western world and forced displacement of peoples globally, there is perhaps no longer a sense of deep belonging to the place of our birth or childhood. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, we continue to create ties to place, whether in places that hold a particular feel for us, or in places we have been forced, by circumstance, to adopt as home. Marshall Berman writes: 'The process

of modernization ... drives us to grasp and confront the world that modernization makes, and to strive to make it our own'. He maintains that 'we and those who come after us will go on fighting to make ourselves at home in this world, even as the homes we have made, the modern street, the modern spirit, go on melting into air' (1983:348).

The intentional walking and the interruptions initiated a process of unearthing feelings and sensations associated with the local area, provoking creation of a personal cartography of neighbourhoods. David Seamon (1979: 79) proposes the term feeling-subject for 'a matrix of emotional intentionalities within the person which extend outwards in varying intensities to the centres, places and spaces of a person's everyday geographical world'. What are the elements that this feeling-subject needs from our surroundings in order to stay, or be long? For Marcus, who already has a sense of ownership about his local area, Bishopston, it's about having more say in what happens in his street:

> We have regular street parties, in fact I'm coordinating the music so actually, of an evening, I just hang out on the street and knock people up and get them on rotas for this, and see if the band's playing in that. It gives me a license to know my neighbours a bit more. But yeah ... compared with how I would like to live, which is where the street had a lot more autonomy and control over all sorts of things that happen in the street, like, we should have a proper powerful neighbourhood street council, it's way off what my ideal would be.

For Anna, a sense of belonging includes having a view. She used to live on the south side of Bristol and appreciated the views, which would appear as she walked through her neighbourhood:

> It's hilly ... the housing's quite dense lots of little streets with densely packed houses, an awful lot of cars ... and there's some great views, you can be in a dense, fairly small claustrophobic-ish street area one minute and see a view right the way over Bristol the next so you do get a feeling of where you are in relationship to the rest of the city, which I really like.

She continued:

> I was reading something the other day and it said something about Darwinian aesthetics and that man ... people, feel happiest when they can see their horizon and it was something to do with being able to locate yourself but also with respect to being able to see anything big that's going to come and eat you, I guess.

We may no longer have the danger of large predators but away from home we are often on a kind of alert. We differentiate between the feelings of being 'at home' and those we experience once we have left 'our neighbourhood'. Lorna notices the different quality of the walk in her neighbourhood compared with other walks:

> I really love how the walk to the Spar and to people in Greenbank feels really different from when I'm going out to walk in around morning or when I'm going to catch a bus or … I walk really, really differently, I walk in a really sort of … well, I'm quite a lazy walker anyway but I just much more … like lolling to the shops and, you know … I love that, I really, really love that quality about being in my neighbourhood and, yeah, feeling like it's like being at home kind of thing … so I kind of noticed that sort of different quality to have a trip to the Spar compared to other walking.

Spaces and places hold atmospheres or climates, which attract or repel us (Debord 1955). Eve has a strong sense of these atmospheres and observes that other peoples' moods influence her feeling about her surroundings:

> I think … some people are moody and some people are happy, it's kind of just … it's kind of life and … I don't know and you kind of look around and you think … on the surface people … you don't know what's going on in their lives and … the moment that you … in the moment that you encounter them they're … they have the same experience as you or they're in the same space, you're in the … you can't really see what it is, you know, that makes them … different to you, you know there's … in that … in that street and that moment there's the shared experience sort of thing that … so you can only kind of see the similarities I guess between you.

It is through these everyday sensations and sensings, mostly unconscious until we choose to pay attention to them, that we begin to locate ourselves, creating meaning and knowledge about where we live and about the people we live in proximity to and encounter every day. Interrupting the everyday walk with a series of improvisations and pauses, however brief, affords the opportunity to pay attention.

Making connections between our world and the world of others increases our knowledge of the neighbourhood life and our relationship to it. Through the interruptions participants noticed they were absorbing this knowledge directly through sensations and senses. Michael Taussig (1992: 144) calls this an '*everyday* tactility of knowing'. Anna absorbs this knowledge through seeing the horizon or a distance:

> I don't know why I like the horizon … not the horizon but a distance but also maybe because … I spend so much time these days focusing on something a foot and a half away … that to take your eyes up and let them … they relax when they're looking long distance … it's that getting an overview of what's outside of you helps you have an overview of yourself as well a bit that you realize that it's not you that's not necessarily the most important thing … and you can put yourself into context when you can see a long way …

Marcus also relates seeing to knowing: 'I like sort of noticing things and knowing the neighbourhood and knowing things a bit more intimately that you don't get on a bicycle or a car 'cause you're whizzing by things'. Bodies move through space absorbing the signs and significations, which then give a sense or 'sensuousness' of belonging, which is simultaneously 'a process of demystification *and* re-enchantment' (Taussig 1992:145). This echoes both the concept of estrangement that is necessary for looking anew, and the wonder, which may result from this re-looking. In the process of carrying out the interruptions participants had to distance themselves from their everyday walk environment in order to re-look at or rediscover it. Nicola, living in the arguably more suburban neighbourhood of Horfield, realized that she knew more about walking routes in Bristol then she had previously thought: 'After I did this I decided I wanted to map little pathways where cars don't go because I know around Bristol there are lots of different pathways and alleyways and I decided I would make a whole map of where they were in Bristol'. Katrin Lund says that walking 'allows the environment to be known through a textural relationship between the walker and the ground', (2008: 120). Jon Anderson suggests that through walking 'A personal, peripatetic understanding of place is excavated as key contiguous associates prompt memories and excavate meanings' (2004:259). Faith walks with her children to school in Easton for this reason: 'I walk to school out of desire, 'cause I want to walk, I want my children to get used to walking and, I like walking as well. Yeah, to get to know my area and people walking to school together. Yeah'.

In walking their everyday routes participants also noticed, or perhaps became aware once more, of this sense of belonging somewhere, of being happy to inhabit where they live. Phill became aware that she was creating her own sense of home in Easton. 'I suppose for me it was quite interesting being relatively new to the neighbourhood it felt like it was a real exploration and bedding down of ownership in a neighbourhood, an investing. I felt like I was investing which was a bit bizarre'. She continues:

> Focussing on those walks I remember being very much appreciating the neighbourhood, investigating the neighbourhood and finding its good qualities. I was aware that I kept finding, and therefore I think I'm looking for, those pockets of green in a not massively green environment, and some roads that are extremely green and being very conscious of why does this road feel better to that one.

For Milly the walking affirmed her attachment to the neighbourhood of Easton: 'I love the area, you know it confirmed that I love living here and … you see things out on the recycle walls and … people have planted things in their front gardens that are only like a centimetre square and … you know, I just got a buzz from noticing these things'. Claire remembered that:

> it was this walk, Sweetmart[6] and the Sugar Loaf[7] that sealed the decision to move to Bristol which was another reason why I chose it I think, because JP who I used to stay with and M all live right near there so I used to do that walk before we lived here … and they would be going 'hello' to people and you know stopping in the street and you were just like 'Oh my God! Come on, can we just go to the shop?'

Here again are resonances with the processes through which other peoples create knowledge: David Abram gives the example of the Western apache, for whom 'human events and encounters simply cannot be isolated from the places that engender them' (Abram 1987: 162). Taking this further, Tim Ingold writes that for the Ojibwa 'knowledge does not lie in the accumulation of mental content. It is not by representing it in the mind that they get to know the world, but rather by moving around in their environment, whether in dreams or waking life, by watching, listening and feeling, actively seeking out the signs by which it is revealed'. (Ingold 2008: 99). Similarly these Bristol participants moved through their local neighbourhoods, and in stopping and starting brought to upper consciousness the identification of signs and significations that meant they knew, and belonged to, a particular neighbourhood or area.

A Sense of Belonging Through Local Knowledge

In spite of an increasing number of available technologies from satnav to Google earth, humans still create knowledge of an area from the ground up, from an everyday moving through time-space. As noted in Helga Holgersson's chapter (Chapter 12) it is through the everyday, the local and the mundane, that 'the world is known otherwise, it is directly felt, sensed, and responded to, outside discourses' (Aquist 2004:170). Through their responses and observations participants highlight the distinction between what we might term personal or vernacular and official knowledges. Claire observed that paying more attention to her neighbourhood of Easton 'made me realize how many people I know … on that walk, whether it's just by sight … or like the man who always feeds pigeons under the bridge and the man who's quite often stood outside the Sugar Loaf a little the worse for, you know, the wear'. Being able to walk around the neighbourhood gives us a different knowledge, an *other* sense of where we live: walking intentionally provides us with material to locate ourselves within, a patch of green we like, or smells that appeal to us. Phill makes sure she takes particular routes through her neighbourhood in order to get a desired affect:

6 A food store on St Marks Road well known for its vast selection of world foods, Indian sweets and lunch counter.

7 A pub on St Marks Road, a favourite meeting point and drinking establishment in Easton.

> I mean, again, I choose different routes to go there, pretty much all the time, and there are ways that I've discovered that I'll sometimes make a detour because I want to see the nice house with the mural or the willow-weaving fence because I like it and I think it's a real, you know, triumph of a bit of greenness over some grey and somebody going: 'We are really … going to make this an amazing space', and so I'll purposely walk that way.

Faith realizes that 'the more I walk the more I know where I live and the more I have a sense of belonging, and that really matters to me'. Val, living in the more leafy neighbourhood of Clifton, started to feel a sense of ownership: 'Rather than feeling, 'Oh God, I'm doing the same walk again and again 'cause this is my regular route', I felt I kinda owned the walk a lot more … and it became like my … my kind of walk and a positive thing rather than, 'Here we are again', for the same thing'. Phill experienced a sudden surge of well-being:

> It felt like there was a real warmth. It was very interesting it kind of galvanized the sense you've got that: 'Oh yes, Easton, it's very neighbourly', which we all kind of say, but I'm not sure that some of us believe it at the bottom line, it's like the young teenage boys say, well, actually they feel quite threatened … and a lot of people won't walk through certain areas, yet we all go: 'Yes, but it's all very lovely and neighbourly and arty and diverse', and it kind of did really enhance that.

Marcus noted that it was nice 'having done something particular in the past, you know, on that route. I do think a bit about that. It has changed it in a way. I think it's made it a little bit more personal, not the specific things, more like a trail that happened in the past to me on that route'.

In and Out of Place

Choosing to do Interruption #2 or #5 meant that participants had to pause or stop walking. Many felt uncomfortable about standing still for no apparent reason, and felt 'out of place'. But for Claire the anticipation was worse than the reality:

> The standing still in a space one was … first of all it was just 'cause I'm not generally very good at standing still anyway … was for the first ten seconds like really hard, and then it was really easy, I could have stayed there for hours, it was really easy, just like la-de-da … looking around … and obviously in St Marks Road there's always quite a lot to look at which is quite handy … but I sort of stood outside one of the busier parts, the part where the kebab shop is and the newsagent and the Thali and everything was open and going, so I was just sort of stood there and people smiling or whatever … yeah so it was … good actually, I quite enjoyed it, thought, 'Mmm, I ought to do this more often, stand around in the street', … yeah.

Val felt that standing alone makes a difference to how you are perceived and noted:

> It's just people think maybe you're being a bit strange when you're stopping and starting, if I'd had a dog … or a child it's fine, yeah, I think it's interesting what social norms are around slowing and stopping and noticing, although I think it's ok to stop and, for example … look up at the tree, at the birds nest or smell a flower or do something like that, if you're just stopping as if you're just thinking, people might worry that you've got some serious mental illness … somehow … bit strange … which is really sad, I think … but that's all … what I'm sort of putting on top of it, people might not have thought that at all.

Val felt the addition of a child or dog assigns us to the category of normal, inoffensive and unthreatening: 'I did it also with my son, and if you've got a child you can basically do anything. As long you're not beating the child, it's fine'. Would people be less noticeable if they stood and stared in a rural setting? Is it the architecture and fabric of the city that makes staring at pavements and brick walls unacceptable or weird? Or is that in the city standing still as opposed to moving with purpose and busy-ness is the unusual element, worthy of attention? As Giulia Carabelli (Chapter 11) observed in the beginning of her exploration of Mostar, walking fast can be a way of 'blending in' of not being noticed. Perhaps because we are usually less aware of our surroundings we have come to rely more on our perceived notions of what can happen as opposed to what *does* in fact happen on our streets. Contrary to what we might anticipate or perceive, a lot of different kinds of people do just stand around on the street, as Claire noticed:

> I sort of noticed that actually there was quite a few people just sort of stood around … it seemed, there was an old guy outside the sort of the other side of Sweetmart that's never so busy who just seemed to be sort of … loitering about and then further on a guy outside the bookies … a Rasta guy who was just sort of stood there … and I was sort of like 'Ah I'm one of the standing around the street people today, good!' So that was quite good … there wasn't that much … nobody really noticed particularly I don't think … I suppose … 'cause of those people it's a bit of a thing that happens there I would guess … whether it's, you know, people stood outside waiting for their friend or in the shop or whatever. But I was there for quite some time so … nobody was sort of like 'What are you doing?' which I thought they might have been, but they weren't really.

Not everyone experienced discomfort: Eileen, in St Werburghs recognized that she felt out of place but was not uncomfortable: 'I felt like an oddball … taking pictures of details on the pavements and which I really enjoyed because it felt quite liberating, it felt quite playful and also I felt like I was an observer'. She was able to stay there for a while:

> When I was standing on the corner … I kind of thought, 'I wonder if I'll just get bored after a minute and carry on', but actually I was there for ages … well, it felt ages … probably five minutes … I forgot why I was standing there at moments … was enjoying watching what was going on and enjoying thinking about what I was doing today, as you do when you're out for a little walk.

Faith found that people had noticed her standing still and enjoyed the feeling that she was, in a sense, on show:

> Sometimes I quite liked it … it's funny, cause I've had a few people saying to me, oh, they've seen me on the hill … just standing there, which actually is when I'd stopped, and I've had two people, who I don't actually know … say, 'Oh, I saw you standing on the hill' (laugh). And I thought, well, I know when that was, and I know I was wearing my coat. Which I feel quite strong about, you know. It makes me feel very comfortable and warm and, and actually it's a winter coat that feels quite glamorous, so I'm quite happy about that (laughter).

Eve spent much of her stopping and staying time on corners listening to conversations around her:

> I'm on the corner of Greenbank cemetery, it's quite good standing on the corner for listening in to other peoples' conversations: 'Where are you?' 'I'm outside now', there's this woman on the phone, she's obviously waiting outside … and these are people in the cemetery. 'Have a good birthday, bye', 'It's a bit top-heavy', 'You get a pension do you?' 'We've got people who come and do the park and everything', 'Bye Auntie Jean', 'Bye, darling'. Then I've stayed … yeah, I've stayed for another ten minutes.

Listening *out* for something, as in attuning oneself to the surroundings, is a skill that can be practised and that comes more easily when one is still. Also uncomfortable perhaps because, in terms of survival instincts, it might invite predators – interesting to consider in terms of the gendered nature of moving in and through spaces. Thus the interruptions were changing the knowledge participants had about their neighbourhood and their sense of belonging and ownership in that area, as well as giving them opportunities to extend the boundaries of their personal comfort zones. Furthermore, they were becoming aware of the intricacies of elements that contribute to our relationship to, and perception of, our surroundings.

Participants' observations and responses demonstrate that the ways we move through and negotiate our city spaces tend to be determined by habit and by our perception of what is expected and permitted. Many of us behave in accordance with largely unwritten codes that define our movements and behaviours in public space. For Claire the issue became one of feeling comfortable enough in a neighbourhood, such as Easton, to be able to do something perhaps spontaneous and yet out of the ordinary rhythm of the street: 'How is it you can make a place

feel so … you know … you could sit on the road and have a picnic and it would be fine?'

Therefore, are our behaviours determined or censored, even, by our perception of what is permissible? It also invites the question; can we really belong somewhere if we can only behave in ways which others might approve of? Furthermore, experiences, such as standing on the corner of a street, where we are required to go out of ourselves, beyond our normal habits and patterns, might give us a sense of a different kind of encounter with others. Encounters, which participants' responses have demonstrated, are important in creating a sense of belonging in a city neighbourhood. Nicola was prompted to make an effort to stop at other points on her route:

> I wanted to try stopping in the pub on the way and instead of walking past it stop in there. Quite often I will look in the charity shop window on my way to work and another time I thought I'll go in there, so just stop in places.

Stopping and stepping into such places also creates more familiarity with an area because it necessitates encounters of one sort or another.

Walking and Talking

Jane Jacobs (1962: 30) maintains that since a city is full of strangers 'a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among all these strangers' and that inhabiting the streets is a fundamental way to keep streets safer. In rural areas or in familiar urban neighbourhoods we might greet or nod to other walkers as a way of acknowledging that we are sharing the space, or that we are paying attention to what is going on around us. In my Easton neighbourhood I make an effort to greet or nod to people I know by sight; in Bristol city centre I do not bother unless I come across someone I know. Richard Sennett suggests that in order to create a sense of the local (or safe) we ghettoize ourselves and in doing so revert to what Solnit (2006) observes as a 'retreat of citizens to private life and private space, screened from solidarity with strangers and increasingly afraid or even unable to imagine acting in public'. Sennett argues that we do not grow through encountering the familiar, but 'only by the processes of encountering the unknown' (1977: 295). He suggests the best places to encounter the unknown and the unfamiliar are in public spaces such as squares, piazzas, plazas and parks where we can watch street artists, families, couples, groups, sports teams, dog walkers. Yet such encountering is passive – we rarely interact with these unknowns. Encountering the unfamiliar accustoms us to take risks however this is more likely to occur when we feel comfortable – employing the familiar everyday walk in our neighbourhood provides some secure parameters for the unfamiliarity of intentional (attempted) talking to others.

Interruption #6
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Interruption #6 invited participants to make an intentional encounter through talking to someone on their walk, necessitating going out of themselves into an *i-don't-know-space* of openness. I was therefore surprised to find out that six participants had chosen to try out this interruption.

Vic's favourite road, apart from the road he lives on, is the Gloucester Road, in the neighbourhood of Bishopston. He likes it because

> it's just got ... the variety of different sort of things happening there, 'cause they're all independently-owned shops, there's no chains only one, Sainsbury's, over there, that's it ... So there's book shops, secondhand shops, the bread shop ... and all that.

It's especially busy on a Saturday, when it can take a long time to walk down it 'cause you just always bump into people' who want to chat. Vic acknowledges: 'It's part of the deal'. In other words part of the deal of living in that neighbourhood is that if you decide to take a walk down the Gloucester Road on a Saturday then you have to be prepared to stop and chat. I was struck by this idea, that living in a particular neighbourhood might bring with it responsibilities, (Massey 2007) and that one responsibility might be to walk down the road and talk to people on the way. Vic's walk down the Gloucester Road on a Saturday, then, is a time-space for encountering and re-establishing connections to neighbourhood and neighbours. Eve chose this interruption because it was something she felt she would like to be able to do, but recognizes that she doesn't. It was a challenge she decided to set herself.

> That one I really wanted to do because ... I do find it really difficult talking to strangers, you know, to get a conversation going and I really admire that in people, people who are able to just ... get chatting to people in the street or you know in the shop, I really admire that quality, so I thought I'd like to have a go and then remind myself why I don't.

Within the parameters of the everyday walk, talking to someone we encounter along the way also means breaking the familiar rhythm and pace of our walk and going out of our way, perhaps literally. This in turn means taking more time to get to our destination. Phill noticed this: 'You talk to quite a lot of people lot round here, it's quite a friendly environment, that waylaid me quite a long time. I seem to remember it took about forty minutes to get where I was going on that particular occasion'.[8] Received perceptions of cities are that they don't often allow meandering or deviation from a purposeful walk. Participants' experiences in Bristol call this notion into question. In considering the idea of talking to another person, participants already moved out of their comfort zones by trying to understand what is it about the process that is difficult, enjoyable or uncomfortable.

8 This walk normally takes her 5 minutes.

Eve noted the whole process she went through as she made her decision whether or not to talk to a particular person:

> I didn't manage to talk to anybody … I really have to be in a particular mood … OK, trying to make eye contact with people is a bit difficult, most people are trying to avoid eye contact, I smile at an old man, he frowns back at me, how about the Dairy Crest delivery driver? How would I start the conversation, something about milk, cows, methane carbon emissions, non-organic hormone-filled milk crates, excess mucus, he's getting in his truck now and driving away … ah that lady with the pink jumper looks friendly, the first woman I've seen, oh she's walking very fast, looks like she's in a hurry. I'm getting towards St Anne's Church and I haven't spoken to anyone yet, no, not the angry man on the phone. There's a magpie, hello Mr Magpie, an old grumpy man telling off a young man, both in ties, I smile at them, the young man smiles back, the old grumpy man tells me to keep walking to the end of the road, I frown at him …

Significant here are the number and complexity of thoughts and connections that came into play as Eve considered this kind of encounter. She was conscious of differentiation and similarity at the same time, the sense of sharing but of not being the same. This interruption points to the deeper and wider issue of the encounter with others, the unknown, and in particular to Finn's (1996) ethical encounter where we are no longer merely one in a category of, for example, woman, child, man; Muslim, atheist, Jew; straight, lesbian, transgender; upper, middle, lower class; black, white, of colour. We also exist, live and experience beyond and between these categories. Letting go of our desire for similarity and commonality, in order to properly listen to and hear the other we might create a more ethical kind of dialogue, an authentic exchange between two (or more) people. Sarah, in Easton, noticed that most people she passed didn't make eye contact with her but she did attempt to talk when she could. 'Several people smiled and we exchanged greetings'. Then at a later date:

> I talked to quite a few people, it got me chatting to all sorts of people, saying 'hello' and I talked to a couple across the street, I even got to know their names and now we wave to each other all the time. There's this old white woman and an old black man … I'm really glad I talked to them now … and then there's another woman further down the road …

Sarah has continued this spontaneous acquaintance, writing in her notes 'We chat now'. Faith sees walking her daughter to school as ' an opportunity to be social'. Although 'sometimes all that actually means is a raised eyebrow and a look of compassion and understanding over the head of a screaming child' the look itself 'can be hugely beneficial and supportive'. Over the years she has become friends with a number of parents in Easton who also walk their children to school,

demonstrating the time-space that is possible for nurturing of relationships through 'little bits of conversations'.

Walking, Talking, and the Creation of Convivial Spaces

We create new understandings through listening and talking during encounters. The walk changes the time-space we move through just as we are also changed by it. Henry Shaftoe (2008: 45) maintains that we need to create the kind of spaces that accommodate deviance and unpredictability, and to consider public spaces as 'dynamic, organic and adaptable, rather than for a fixed single use'. This kind of flexibility is analogous to our own psychological and emotional state of being in preparation for Finn's (1996) ethical encounter. The opportunity to experience an everyday friction of coming up against differences and difficulties provokes a moving beyond the categories that divide us. Back in the1960s Jane Jacobs (1962:75) was advocating a very different way of creating living spaces in cities.

> The tolerance, the room for great differences among neighbors – differences that often go far deeper than differences in color – which are possible and normal in intensely urban life, but which are so foreign to suburbs and pseudosuburbs, are possible and normal only when streets of great cities have built-in equipment allowing strangers to dwell in peace together on civilized but essentially dignified and reserved terms.

Provisional types of coming together and exchanges might be envisaged, public spaces can be temporary and happen overnight then disappear the next. New ways of communications – flash mobs and mobile phones – can be instrumental in bringing people physically together in a short space of time. Bristol is home to igFest, a weekend of games and events that emphasize pedestrian exploration of the city through a mix of fantasy games and happenings communicated often through mobile phones. In Bristol there are other ways in which local identity is affirmed: neighbourhoods host their own art walks (Easton, Totterdown, Bishopston, North Bristol, Southville for example) each with a distinct feel, which happen on a yearly basis and provide opportunities for people to visit other neighbourhoods as well as opportunities to open their house to visitors. Streets Alive! is a Bristol organization that promotes and partially funds street parties. In Easton summer months are full of these – with neighbours having a chance to chat, make and eat food together, cover the street in artificial grass or sand, create kids' games, make artwork, music and dance – turning the street into the beach.

After the Walks and Final Thoughts

Have traces of the walks and interruptions remained and if so, what effect has this had on future walks and participants' relationships to their city neighbourhoods? Julie observed that:

> It has made me think a little bit more about what's going on … on one of the walks I found a hat, a child's hat, so every time I go past where it is 'cause it's still there, I have a look and see if it's still there. So I'm just a bit more conscious of my surroundings.

Val observed that:

> It felt that I kind of did notice much more and did think about what I had noticed previously, sort of checking that the skip was there and things like that … and almost a sense of disappointment at not having to do the … interruption.

Eileen made a similar observation:

> That street corner has a different story to tell for me now 'cause I know it I've been someone who stood on it, so I think all those details will come in … maybe there'll be a greater tendency to kind of look around a bit.

Phill muses:

> I have subsequently … walked down to the Sweetmart and the Sugar Loaf, and on some occasions I'm conscious of it being the route that I originally took, and on other occasions it's forgotten. Yeah, it's kind of logged in there.

Janet now 'can't do this walk without looking at things and thinking "Oh what's happened to that door?" Or "That building's gone", or, you know, anything … It's sort of raised my consciousness. It has changed and the environment looks very different'.

Eileen was struck

> that such a simple route[9] could be so delightful … with … you know … just taking a bit more time not being so anxious to get there and back … and put the tea on … or whatever … and the photos really helped that I think … they really focussed in perception.

Nicola felt inspired to think about mapping the unnoticed alleyways in Bristol. Anna decided to make recordings of one of her children 'talking about stuff' during

9 Eileen's route to her local shop, Sunnis, is approximately 50 metres long.

the walks back from the nursery because 'it's the one time that I'm on my own with her ... now'. Claire was prompted to contemplate whether it's possible to design places in the city which create an ambience where it feels fine to sit on the road and have a picnic because 'it is a mystery, really ... in terms of architecture'.

Becoming aware and attentive on their repeated everyday walks participants accumulated layers of knowledge that contributed to a sense of belonging and inhabiting. Walking through Bristol city neighbourhoods such as Easton, Clifton Wood, St Werburghs and Bishopston then, gave participants the opportunity to re-establish and identify signs and significations that affirmed their pleasure in belonging to a particular neighbourhood. These varied from the ability to see around themselves, to hear and listen to their surroundings, to notice particular things which appeal to an aesthetic sense, to encounter familiar people or landmarks and to notice changes in these and themselves. Furthermore, following Federica Gatta and Maria Anita Palumbo, such a methodology can also serve as a political and civic tool that can provoke insights into the city under transformation and change. Participants' accounts also demonstrate that the power of walking as a tool for locating self and creating a sense of belonging is not to be underestimated. A heightened awareness of such occurrences has the potential to lead to further questioning about our relationship to space and place and to others within these. Furthermore, following participants' observations, becoming more aware of this process of inhabiting and belonging, might extend to include an awareness of the communities they are part of. We might then ask, as Augoyard does, whether 'the modalities of lived experience belonging to each inhabitant ... participate in a community of meaning?' Might it be the case that 'Beyond the "I" there is undoubtedly a "we", which expresses itself in everydayness' (2007:5)? Does this we, as Massey suggests, bring along with it 'the possibility of thinking of placed identity not as a claim *to* a place but as the acknowledgement of the responsibilities that inhere in *being placed*' (2007:216)? Such responsibilities as being able to go beyond a habitual sense of ourselves to find a place where we may engage with others in an authentic dialogue or 'ethical encounter'.

The development of the contemporary European city, the concept of urban planning, the creation of the assembly line and mass production, notions of streamlining of the means of production, from machines to body movements, have influenced the way we move and think through our contemporary life-world. In the process of embracing these developments we have become increasingly unable to take time-space for inefficiencies, awkward moments, unpredictability and spontaneity within our everyday routines, such as the walk to work, the pub, school, the mosque. Yet by its very nature of being a tightly choreographed, streamlined routine, an everyday walk in Bristol neighbourhoods holds the possibility for individual digression and transgression, in part through interventions proposed by this ethno-Situationist methodology, which invites us, as Guilia Carabelli suggests in Chapter 11, to walk reflectively, to look differently at our surroundings and re-establish our connection to where we live and, possibly, belong.